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THE GOLD SHIP; or, Merle, the Condemned.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

AUTHOR OF "FREELANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCiless," "MERLE, THE MIDDY,"
"THE MIDSHIPMAN MUTINEER," "THE FLOATING FEATHER," ETC., ETC., ETC.



"HA! HA! HA! MERLE, THE CONDEMNED, BRANDT, THE BUCCANEER, TRIUMPHS AT LAST, AS I HAVE SWORN TO!"

The Gold Ship;

OR,

MERLE, THE CONDEMNED.

A Tale of Land and Blue Water,

AND A COMPANION ROMANCE TO "FREE-LANCE, THE BUCCANEER," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "MERLE, THE MIDDY," "THE MIDSHIPMAN MUTINER," AND "THE FLOATING FEATHER."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATE'S STORY.

A VESSEL of war, sailing over the rough waters of the Gulf, with storm-clouds threatening to burst above and hurl a tempest of wind and rain upon the little craft, and at her helm: a negro boy.

It was a strange sight to see, guiding the vessel over the waves, that slender, black-faced youth, while from the forecastle to the quarter-deck a hundred pairs of eyes were bent upon him with strange interest.

That the craft was a sea-warrior, I have said, for her guns and all about her indicated that much, and her men were in uniform and armed; but neither at peak nor fore was visible a flag to make known her nationality.

Near the helmsman, who held the wheel with a nervy hand, and a strength that was surprising in one of his apparent youth and slender, graceful build, stood a man—a very Hercules in size, and yet so well formed that he looked little above the average height of men.

It was only by comparison with any one of the crew who passed near him that his great size was evident.

He was dressed in dark-blue pants, a white jacket with brass buttons, wore a sash around his waist, which supported a gem-hilted sword and a pair of pistols, and upon his head was the cocked hat of a naval officer of that time—a style in vogue in the early part of the present century.

His face was beardless, his features good, and he certainly would have been considered a very handsome man by any one who did not know him as *Brandt, the Buccaneer*.

But, known as the Sea Terror—the last of the Pirates of the Gulf—the fearful deeds of his life could be seen in every lineament of his face.

"Black Diamond, you are certain that that is the Treasure Island of Merle Monte?"

The remark was addressed by the pirate chief to the negro boy at the helm.

"I don't say dat, massa cap'n; but I does say dat when I las' seen dat ilum, dar libed dere a han'some young gemman, an' a mighty ugly nigger, sah."

"They are the same I now have on board my vessel as prisoners. The boy, Merle Monte, is the son of a man who was noted some years ago as Montezuma, the Merciless, and whose grandfather was Freelance, the Buccaneer.

"Freelance married a Persian princess, and their son, Montezuma, got his father's piratical wealth and his wife's treasure, and his son—this Merle Monte—possesses now all of their combined riches, which his father had on a vessel coming to this country.

"A Persian cruiser pursued Montezuma, and he fell on his deck, while his wife, a New Orleans lady, gave birth during the battle to the boy who is now my prisoner. He inherited all the wealth, and, with his Abyssinian slave, was wrecked upon an island upon this Mexican coast, and for which I have been looking for long years.

"I was a sub-officer on the vessel of Montezuma, and I know well the value of the

riches he left the boy, and which he and the slave, Mezrak, have hidden on that island.

"The ones you saw, Black Diamond, were Merle Monte, now a condemned midshipman of the United States navy, and Mezrak, and they are now in this vessel as my prisoners."

"I know dat massa cap'n hab some very valuable priz'ner on board, but I hab not know who dem war; but dey now does look 'zactly like de pretty boy an' ugly nigger I seen on de ilum when I went dar in my massa's yacht," said Black Diamond, giving the wheel a few turns to starboard, to meet the wind, which was coming in fitful gusts.

"Well, Diamond, I have told you who they were, and I have long tried to get them into my power, to wring from them the secret of where lay their Treasure Island.

"The negro had the boy educated at a Padre's college in Vera Cruz, pretending he was the son of a rich ranchero along the coast. Chance caused them to capture my craft, and it got for Merle a middy's birth in the navy of the United States.

"As Satan looks after his children, I escaped, and when I got another craft, Merle Monte again took it, for he led a boat attack which my green crew could not resist.

"But he had foes in the navy, who hated his good fortune, and they struck at him through his slave, Mezrak, whom he loves as he would a father, and a mother, too, and the result was the boy resented it, and the two were proclaimed mutineers.

"I saved them from the yard-arm, and have in vain tried to force from them their secret; but now through you, my boy, whom I picked up in the streets of New Orleans, a runaway slave from your master, I have found this island, and you shall be a sharer in my good luck."

"How massa cap'n get away when the 'Mericans capture him?" asked Black Diamond, as though he cared more for the story of adventure than for the promised riches.

"When I saw my vessel was to be taken, I jumped overboard in the lagoon and swam ashore."

"No, massa; de time, I means, when dey did catch yer?"

"Ah, yes! I was taken to Washington City to be executed; but a cabin boy on the vessel, and who went by the name of Little Belt, rescued me in the nick of time."

"Whar Little Belt now?" asked Black Diamond.

"You are curious, Black Diamond, but as it is through you that I got my enormous treasure, I will tell you, and see that you act right toward me, or you will go the way he did."

"Which way he go, massa cap'n?" was the next persistent question of the black boy pilot.

"He turned out to be a woman, and not a boy. I had believed that she was dead; but she owed me a grudge, and was not content to see me hang at the yard-arm, when she had not brought me there; so she set me free to bring me to justice herself."

"She told me this much, and so I killed her on my way to Baltimore, to catch a vessel I knew was to sail with the morning tide."

"You kilt her, sah?"

"Yes; and left her in the stage road."

"Golly! hain't you brave, massa cap'n?"

"I don't think it was a brave act, Black Diamond, but it was a necessary one, and if the carrying out of my ends demand it, I would kill an infant; but as you near the island, do you feel certain it is the one you visited on your master's yacht, and where you saw the boy and slave in Persian costume?"

"Yes, massa; it am de ilum."

"Well, as this storm is threatening to burst upon us, perhaps we had better run offshore, ride out the gale, and then run in?"

"Oh, no, massa cap'n, for dere am a safe harbor in dere, an' I knows how to run dar."

"You are certain?"

"Yes, massa cap'n."

"Remember a mistake loses the vessel and our lives."

"I knows dat, sah, but dis nigger boy hain't gwine ter lose 'em," was the confident reply.

"Well, I will have Merle, the condemned middy, and his slave, Mezrak, brought on deck and tied to the taffrail, that they may witness my triumph in at last finding the Treasure Island without their aid. Here, I'll take the wheel, for we are a long way off yet, and you go after them; and mind you, Diamond, bring me a basket of that rare old Spanish wine on deck, and give to the crew all the liquor they want, for I'll drink deep in honor of this, my greatest, success."

"Yas, massa cap'n," and Black Diamond left the deck to obey the pirate's bidding.

CHAPTER II.

THE PIRATE'S PRISONERS.

WHEN Black Diamond left the deck of the pirate cutter upon his mission from its reckless and cruel commander, Brandt, the Buccaneer, he found his way into a trap, rather than a state-room, where the two prisoners were confined.

It had been made as a store-room for valuables, had an iron door, and the light came from a glass bull's-eye in the deck, the ventilation being through a slide in the upper panels of the door.

The Black Pilot took the key given him by the chief, and unlocking the iron door, stepped within.

The space was limited, indeed, and the furniture of the prison pen consisted of a hammock, a bench, a rug, and a stone pitcher of water.

It was a loathsome place, but here had been confined for long weeks Merle Monte, whom misfortune and not crime had made a mutineer, and who was under death sentence, a condemned youth, and his slave, Mezrak, the Faithful.

In vain had the pirate, with threats and torture, tried to force from them the secret they held of where lay the Treasure Island, in which was buried the vast inheritance of Merle Monte, consisting of his freebooter grandfather's hoarded wealth, and the dowry of a Persian princess.

Neither Merle or Mezrak had been driven to a confession, and hoping yet to drag from their lips the secret, Brandt, the Buccaneer, kept them in their loathsome prison-pen.

The light from the bull's-eye in the deck shone upon a youth of striking face and form.

His features were really beautiful, yet manly withal, and his form had the elegance of a woman, with the strength and broad shoulders of a man.

He was in the uniform of an American midshipman, which looked something the worse for his long confinement, and lay at rest in the hammock, while his slave sat upon the bench in moody meditation.

The faces of both men were haggard, for their confinement was telling upon them in their close quarters.

The slave, Mezrak, was an Abyssinian, and, excepting his eyes, which were really beautiful when he was passive, and his heart, which was true and noble, he was a hideous deformity.

His attire was that of the Persian, and it too was seedy-looking.

As he sat there, his long arms and huge hands hanging down upon each side of him, he looked like a chained giant in strength, for he was manacled about the ankles, and the youth had an iron handcuff upon one of his small wrists, as though the two were to be feared even among a hundred pirates.

"Wal, what do you wish here?" asked Merle Monte, sternly, as he saw the negro boy step within the cramped quarters.

"I hab come by order of Cap'n Brandt, massa," was the low reply.

"Some new torture, I suppose, we are to undergo," said Merle, in a resigned tone.

The Black Pilot made no reply, but simply closed the door, and put his finger upon his lips in token of silence.

Then he stepped clear up to Merle, and whispered:

"Yes, a new torture, but not for you."

"For Mézrak, then?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Brandt, the Buccaneer."

Merle started, and even the stoical Mézrak waked up quickly, for suddenly the black boy had dropped the negro accent wholly.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK PILOT.

"You are the negro boy known as Black Diamond?" said Merle, who had seen the boy upon the vessel, before he and Mézrak had been sent below decks to their prison.

"I am called Black Diamond, and I am the chief's cabin boy," was the response.

"Why have you so suddenly dropped your negro accent, which I thought natural to you?"

"Because I am not what I seem."

"Who are you, then?"

"A cabin boy."

"What else?"

"An avenger."

"Ah! who is your intended victim?"

"Brandt, the Buccaneer," was the savage reply.

"How has he wronged you?"

"It is a story I cannot now tell; but do you know where this vessel is heading now?"

"It is searching for what Brandt calls my Treasure Island," said Merle, with a smile.

"No, the search has ended."

"Ha! what do you mean?"

"It has been found."

"My island?"

"Yes."

"I do not believe you."

"It is true."

"Where is it?"

"A league ahead of us as we are now running."

"Describe the outline."

"A rocky coast, with three higher rocks in the interior, the center one rising to a greater height than the other two."

Merle glanced at Mézrak as the Black Pilot said this, but his slave showed no sign to betray interest.

"You'll never reach my island," said Merle.

"You are mistaken, for I shall pilot the cutter to it within the hour."

Merle laughed, and the Black Pilot continued:

"You know that I have described your island, and you feel that no one can run a vessel into it."

Merle made no reply, and the negro boy continued:

"But you are mistaken, for I told the chief it was the Treasure Island, and that I had visited it some time ago, while cruising with my master, whom I said was a planter."

"You did this?"

"I told the chief so."

"Why did you tell him such a falsehood?"

"For a purpose."

"Ah! but go on."

"Well, I told him I saw there a white boy and a black slave dressed in Persian costume."

"Ha!"

"So I told him, and more, I said I could run the craft into the island."

"Try it," was the laconic remark of Merle.

"Ah! I intend to, for I am now the pilot for the run in, and the chief bade me come below and lead you and your slave on deck."

"For what purpose?"

"To chain you to the taffrail."

"That we may go down with the cutter?"

"No."

"For what reason, then?"

"To see me run in."

"You do not intend to attempt it?"

"I certainly do."

"You will wreck the craft."

The negro boy smiled, but answered quietly:

"Not if I follow this chart."

He took a paper from his pocket as he spoke.

Merle gazed at him in surprise, and unflinchingly he met the look of Mézrak also, for the huge slave had turned at the last words of the boy.

His form was slender but graceful, and dressed as he was, in a white duck jacket, blue pants, and a red sash, with a jaunty tarpaulin upon his head, he was certainly a most attractive-looking negro boy.

"What chart have you, then?" asked Merle, after an instant of silence.

"I have an outline of the island, which you drew, and the directions for running a vessel into the harbor."

"Ha! it is my chart!" cried Merle, excitedly, thrusting his hand into his pocket.

"Yes."

"You stole it from me!" and with a spring Merle was upon him, and had wrenched the paper from his hand.

But the Black Pilot did not move a muscle, while he quietly said:

"I know the contents by heart."

At that instant he felt the grip of Mézrak upon him, and his death would certainly have followed, had it not been for his utterly fearless mien, which caused the slave to hesitate.

"I did not steal that paper, Midshipman Monte, for it dropped from your pocket upon the deck, the day Captain Brandt triced you up to the yard-arm, pretending he was going to blow you to atoms from the cannon's mouth."

"Did Brandt see it?"

"He did not."

"Had he done so, my services as pilot would not be needed."

"You are playing a part here, and Mézrak, as well as myself, seems to have recognized that, or you would now be dead."

"I am playing a part, and a bold one."

"I am also your friend, and the friend of your slave."

"Do you mean this?" quickly asked Merle.

"I will soon prove it."

"Come, I will unlock your irons from the floor and lead you and your slave on deck."

"See, I also unlock those about your wrist and the slave's ankles, but they must be supposed to be locked."

"I will chain you to the taffrail, but you will be free, as you know."

"Now come on deck, and utter no word to anger Brandt, the Buccaneer."

"Boy, who are you?"

The Black Pilot made no reply, but led the two prisoners upon deck.

The storm was threatening to burst at any moment, the cutter was plunging in the wild waters, and the crew were at their posts, as the Black Pilot led the two prisoners aft and chained them abaft the wheel, and within two feet of the pirate chief who was still acting as helmsman.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLACK NEMESIS.

THE buccaneer vessel still held on her course toward the island, which was visible through the gathering shadows of night and the storm about half a league dead ahead.

It was a rocky island, perhaps half a mile in length, and half that distance in breadth, with two hill-like points at either end, and one in the center.

Around it and about it was all a mass of

foam, showing that there were reefs around it, and treacherous rocks to bring destruction upon an approaching vessel.

The whisper had gone forward among the crew that it was Merle Monte's Treasure Island, which the pirate chief had so long searched for, and yet, though they felt that fabulous wealth lay hidden among its rocks, the men feared to have the vessel run in, in such a storm, and a tempest threatening to break upon them at any moment.

The negro boy whom they had seen the chief place at the helm seemed perfectly cool, and had shown himself, young as he was, a thorough sailor; but then, what could he do in seeking a haven among those ragged reefs, they thought; and they wondered that Brandt, the Buccaneer, did not run offshore and wait until the storm subsided.

The pirate chief had also this thought, and once more said to the Black Pilot, as the boy came on deck with the prisoners:

"Black Diamond, it looks like certain death to run in there."

"It does look so, massa cap'n," was the reply of the youth, who had resumed his negro dialect.

"Then suppose I put the craft about, and run off a few leagues and lay to?"

"We can easily do it with this wind."

"Does yer know yer la'tood an' long'tood exactly, massa cap'n?"

"Not exactly, Diamond."

"Waal, sah, I does be skeert ef we runs away from dis ilum onat, we'll never fetch it ag'in."

"I don't agree with you, Diamond."

"Does yer see dat a' storm?"

"Yes."

"It am gwine ter bu'st from de westward, sah!"

"Yes."

"Waal, it hab plenty ob wind ter drive us afore it far off in de Gulf, an' we might not find our way brck."

"Sides, sah, it am gwine ter be a tornady, an' it might sink us, while in dat ilum am a most safe anchoridge for dis boat."

"But can you find it, Diamond?"

"I kin, sah."

"In this darkness that is coming on, and the storm, too?"

"Yes, sah, I kin."

"But the men look a little mutinous, and I don't want trouble with them at such a time."

"No, sah, dat won't be pleasant; but dat kin be made all right."

"How, Diamond?"

"I'll git dat licker yer tolle me 'bout, an' dat'll set 'em up ter goin' anywhar, massa cap'n."

"Black Diamond, you are a gem of the first water!"

"Get up the liquor, and when the men have that they'll stand at their posts and see me run the vessel to Hades."

"Yes, sah, dey'll do dat, sure; but I'll go now an' git de licker."

Black Diamond again disappeared below decks, leaving the chief, as before, at the wheel.

Turning to his two prisoners, Brandt, the Buccaneer, eyed them for an instant, and then said, in gloating tones:

"Well, Merle Monte, the Condemned, without your aid I have found your Treasure Island, and when I once set foot upon it, I'll have my revenge upon you and your hideous slave, for so long keeping your riches out of my hands."

"Ha! ha! ha! Merle, the Condemned, Brandt, the Buccaneer, triumphs at last, as I have sworn to!"

At that moment Black Diamond came on deck, a huge decanter filled with red Spanish wine in one hand, and a goblet of gold in the other, and the scene was lighted up by a vivid flash of lightning which showed the face of the pirate chief in all its frenzy of gloating triumph.

"I have given de men dere licker, massa cap'n, an' here am yourn," said Black Diamond.

As he spoke he poured out a glass of the rum, and handed the goblet and the decanter to the chief, while he took his place at the wheel.

"Well, boy, here's that you run this Death's gantlet before us in safety. Do so, and you shall be made as rich as a prince, though your skin is as black as yonder clouds."

The Black Pilot made no reply, but brought the bows of the cutter up a couple of points, and then eyed the storm-clouds, the wild waves, the movements of the vessel, and the island looming up so threateningly dead ahead, for he knew that a few more moments and the crisis must come.

And come it did, for with a steady hand he ran the fated craft directly upon a huge sunken reef, just as the hurricane burst upon the sea, and as she struck, the drink-maddened chief, his brain on fire, his limbs benumbed, heard it hissed in his ears that the Black Pilot was an avenging Nemesis, revenging a cruel wrong done in the past.

Paralyzed with the poison which the black Nemesis has put into the wine, knowing at the last who was the avenger, with a cry of horror Brandt the Buccaneer was borne from the deck of his shattered vessel, and with his men, also drink-maddened, hurled into the raging waters, while the Pilot and the prisoners alone remained upon the vessel, which rocked wildly upon its bed of sunken reefs, under the savage blows of the sea, and the fierce gusts of the gale.

CHAPTER V.

A SURPRISE.

"You are free, so why do you still remain in your chains?"

It was Black Diamond who uttered the words, and he shouted them above the roar of the winds and the wash of the waves, and addressed them to Merle and Mezrak, who still remained at the taffrail, gazing upon the wild scene, and listening to the death-cries of some drowning victim not as much under the influence of the poisoned liquor as his fellows.

It was an appalling scene, with the ebon clouds above, the snow-white foam of the waters below, the howling winds, the roaring waves, the rocking of the ship, the creaking of its timbers, and the cries of those washed off to die.

Clinging to the wheel, which, there to save the vessel, had hurled her to destruction, was Black Diamond, and his face showed that he was deeply moved, while, as a wave had borne Brandt, the Buccaneer, off on its crested bosom, he had broken forth in wild, almost demoniacal laughter.

When at last there remained on the deck but Merle, his slave, and Black Diamond, the latter had spoken the words which open this chapter.

In response to them Merle and Mezrak threw the unlocked irons from them, and stood before the Black Pilot, while the former asked:

"Are we all that are left?"

"No."

"Who else are on board?"

"A boy who is called Needles, and a dozen men of the crew whom I locked in the hold."

"They were guiltless of wrong-doing, though they had shipped in bad company, and it remains for you to say whether they shall go free, or you command your slave to end their lives."

"If you vouch for them they can go," said Merle.

"I only know that they were men who shipped on a desperate enterprise, driven to it by their circumstances, and when they found out the truth wished themselves ashore again."

"The ship will not go to pieces here, unless the wind moves round, so they can remain in the hold until morning, and then we can decide what to do with them."

"Now let us go into the cabin and await the dawn."

Merle followed the strange black youth to the cabin, and Mezrak brought up the rear.

Within all was considerably shaken up by the shock of the driving upon the reef, but the three sat down, and for some moments were silent, while the vessel trembled and swayed, as some larger wave than usual would strike her.

At last Merle looked at the youth who had behaved so strangely through all, and said:

"Again I ask who are you?"

"One who has had a poor revenge for the wrong done him."

"How could Buccaneer Brandt wrong you so cruelly, that you have wrought such a fearful revenge?"

"I will tell you, for I feel now that you should know."

"Do you recall Little Belt?"

"A cabin-boy on the Sea Wolf?"

"The same."

"He went on the captured pirate vessel to Washington with you?"

"He did."

"And proved to be the friend of Brandt, the Buccaneer, in disguise, or was bribed to release him."

"How did he prove his friend?"

"He most cleverly set him free, when he was in irons on the vessel."

"That was no proof."

"I am at a loss to understand why."

"I will tell you," said Black Diamond, with a smile.

"He hated Brandt, and wished to see him hanged; but he did not wish him to die unless he had himself been the means of bringing him to that end."

"You, and not Little Belt, having captured the Buccaneer, he set him free, to in the end bring him to justice."

"He certainly failed in his good intention, and had he allowed him to be hanged then, I would not now be condemned to death as I am for mutiny, of which I am at heart not guilty."

"Brandt would have been hanged but for the fact that I wished to save you," was the low reply.

"Save me?" asked Merle, in surprise.

"Yes, you and your slave."

"What had that to do with it?"

"Had he not been lured upon this island by my saying I could pilot him here, he intended, in a day or two, to cut your slave limb from limb, or yourself, to wring from one of you, who would not see the other suffer, the secret of where was hidden your treasure."

"To save you, I lured him here to die, instead of allowing him to continue his piratical cruising a short while longer, until I could betray him to some vessel-of-war."

"You are a strange being, and I thank you for myself and Mezrak; but what know you of Little Belt?" said Merle.

"I know that, after he had aided Brandt, the Buccaneer, to escape, he was cruelly shot down and left for dead in the highway between Washington and Baltimore."

"But the boy did not die."

"I am glad to know that, for I liked him."

"And he liked you and your slave; but you recall Mr. Belden, do you not?"

"Yes, for it was through that good little man that we recaptured the cutter, though Brandt escaped."

"Mr. Monte, that good little man, as you call him, was none other than Little Belt."

CHAPTER VI.

LITTLE BELT'S CONFESSION.

The surprising statement made by Black Diamond, that one who was supposed to be an old man was none other than Little Belt,

the cabin-boy of the Sea Wolf, who had freed the pirate chief, caused even Mezrak to look up at the black youth with amazement.

"Why, Little Belt set the chief free, while Mr. Belden led us to the attack upon him."

"True, for he was in that way bringing, as he hoped, the pirate to the gallows."

"Ah, yes, I remember; but if Mr. Belden was Little Belt, then his disguise was most complete."

"Was it more complete than mine is now?" was the calm question.

"What! are you disguised?" asked Merle, in surprise.

"I am."

"You are not what you seem, then?"

"I am not."

"Who are you?"

"I have not one drop of African blood in my veins."

"Impossible! for your negro complexion is perfect."

"It is put on, for I learned the art of dyeing myself black years ago."

"It is hard to believe," said Merle, doubtfully.

"Yes, when it is as real in appearance as is the skin of Mezrak."

"But be convinced by my showing you that this is not my own hair."

As he spoke he drew off a most skillfully made wig of wool, and beneath was a wealth of short curls.

Merle was surprised, and Mezrak gave a grunt of amazement.

"Now see here."

And Black Diamond threw aside his jacket, rolled up his shirt-sleeve, and displayed above the elbow an arm of dazzling whiteness, and molded perfectly.

Merle could not be convinced, and Mezrak eyed the strange youth with more interest than he ever before vouchsafed to any one.

"Now, Mr. Monte, as in Little Belt you had Mr. Belden, so in both of them you find Black Diamond."

"What! are you, then, Little Belt?" and Merle sprung forward and grasped the youth's hand.

"I am."

"Allah arievak!" devoutly said Mezrak in the Arab tongue, and which meant:

"God be with you."

"No wonder you are inspired into one of your prayers, Mezrak, for I am wholly dumfounded," said Merle.

Little Belt, as I will now call him, smiled, and said:

"Senor Monte, I confessed to Captain Meredith, of the Sea Wolf, just who I was, for I found it necessary to do so, to make him believe that Lieutenant Dunning Graham and Midshipman Paul Martin had plotted your ruin."

"You remember I remained on the cutter after her capture, and I witnessed the pretended mutiny which makes you a condemned outlaw to-day."

"I told Captain Meredith the truth, and bitterly I regretted I could not have been at your trial, but it was ordained otherwise."

"I was trying to track Brandt in New Orleans, when too late I got upon his trail, and he had retaken his cutter."

"But when he returned to the city, with his vessel disguised, I recognized him, and going to my quarters, I dressed up as you now see me, and pretending to be a negro boy run away from a plantation drogher, I spoke to him, and he took me with him, and the result you know."

"You absolutely astound me, Little Belt, by all you tell me."

"But now that your future is linked with mine, we will remain together, for this is indeed my Treasure Island, where, when an infant, my father's vessel was wrecked. Here I was brought up by good Mezrak, and now, hunted by those I have faithfully served, condemned to die upon the yard-arm

for mutiny, when I only defended my life, I will be content to remain away from the world in future, and live and die here, I think."

Merle spoke earnestly, and with deep feeling, and Little Belt resumed:

"To-morrow, when we view the bodies washed upon the shore, and I see among them that of Brandt, the Buccaneer, I will say 'Yes, gladly will I remain here.'"

"But he is certainly dead."

"I have thought so, so often, and been deceived."

"But you poisoned him first, I believe, and then a wave bore him away to his death."

"It might have, and maybe not; but to-morrow will show, for the bodies all went over the reef, and they will be hurled upon the sands."

"Yes; but may I ask why you so hated Brandt, the Buccaneer?"

"Because he wronged me most cruelly," almost shrieked Little Belt.

"Ay, he led me to believe him a man of honor, deceived me into a mock marriage with him, caused the death of my poor mother, and twice attempted my own life."

"I tell you, Merle Monte, I am not what I seem, for now I confess to you that I am a woman."

"A woman, yes, and one who at last wreaked vengeance upon Brandt, the Buccaneer, though would to God her revenge could have been far worse than it has, for gladly would I have seen him die on the gallows, and smiled in his face as he strangled to death."

Merle sprung to his feet at the words, and Mezrak sat spell-bound, for now the secret of the Black Pilot was known in all its bitterness.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

THE surprise of Merle Monte at what he heard from the lips of the wronged woman, and whose sex he had never for a moment doubted, was so great that for a while he was speechless.

At last, however, he said:

"Now I can understand why it was that Brandt, the Buccaneer, started so when you spoke a few words to him that I did not hear."

"I told him my name," was the low reply.

"That name," continued Merle, dropping the bold, reckless manner habitual to him, and with the courtly grace he always wore in the presence of the fair sex, "I do not care to ask you; but knowing you as a woman, no matter what your disguise may be, I beg you to feel that you shall be protected here as though you were of my own blood."

"This cabin you can make yourself comfortable in, and Mezrak and myself will go into the sub-officers' mess-room until the morning."

"No, no, Mr. Monte, I am not one to throw off a disguise I have worn so long, and at once claim the privileges of my sex in seeking comfort."

"I will sleep there in the chief's state-room, for I am really very weary."

"Good-night!"

Without another word she went into the state-room, and Merle and Mezrak ascended to the deck.

The storm had blown itself out, and the vessel was rocking less, and also the waves hit it less savage blows; but, as the island was not visible, and they knew it would be madness to attempt to go there, they returned to the cabin, and while Merle threw himself down to rest upon a divan, Mezrak stretched out upon a rug, and the two were soon sound asleep, for their long confinement had told upon them, and at last wearied out Nature asserted its rights in a slumber of utter prostration.

It was several hours after midnight that a

human form came from the state-room of the chief, and gazed at the two sleepers.

Their regular breathing told that they slumbered heavily, and with light tread the person crossed the cabin, and in gliding beneath the dim swinging lamp, the face and form of Little Belt, as I will now call her, were visible.

Quickly she passed up the companionway and stood upon the deck.

The storm had wholly ended, and a moon, just on the wane, rode in a sky from which every cloud had gone.

The wind was blowing only fitfully, and in light puffs, and the night had become soft and balmy once more.

The rocky island lay grim in the moonlight, its iron shores hurling back the waves that still dashed upon it, for the sea was not yet calm.

The vessel lay upon a reef, which in calm weather was a projecting spur of the island, and wholly visible, while sunken rocks, which she had passed on her way in, lay astern of her, and could be seen off-shore for the distance of half a mile.

How the craft had come through to the land in safety seemed little short of a miracle, and Little Belt, evidently proud of his piloting feat, muttered grimly:

"I ran her through every danger, to wreck her here as skillfully as though I had sailed the channel for years."

A large boat hung at the starboard davits, and beneath it was evidently deep water, and another was on deck, badly stove, and these were all that had escaped.

Forward, the vessel was an utter wreck, for her bows were literally in atoms, and the forecastle was open, and the timbers upon either side torn away, while both masts had gone down with the shock, and with their wreck of rigging had been hurled on shore.

As she stood contemplating the wreck and the wild scene, her quick eye detected several dark objects upon the reef moving slowly toward the vessel.

They were men, she soon saw, though they came along slowly and with evident pain.

"After all Satan has been good to some of his servants, and spared them," she muttered, and then in a low tone she added, while she drew a pistol from her belt:

"But they shall die, for none must live."

Nearer and nearer drew the forms, and presently they stood beneath the shadow of the vessel, little dreaming who was looking down upon them.

There were three of them, and the course they had come along the reef showed that they had been washed back from the shore, and managed to cling to the rocks upon which lay the vessel.

They looked utterly worn out and seemed to suffer, and one said in deep tones, which distinctly reached the ear of the woman:

"Well, we are all that are saved, that is certain, and I am happy in being here and knowing that that accursed woman, Merle Monte, and his slave are at the bottom of the sea."

"You are mistaken, Brandt, the Buccaneer; the accursed woman still lives."

"Great God!"

The cry broke from his lips as he heard and recognized her voice, and he sunk back against a rock for shelter, while his two comrades turned as though to fly.

But, bleeding, suffering, and worn out as he was, Brandt was no man to lose his nerve wholly, and he rallied quickly and said:

"Woman, I had hoped that you were at the sea's bottom."

"No; I took good care of myself—Hold! do not attempt to board this craft, or, so help me High Heaven, you die!"

He drew back, and she continued:

"Brant Brentford, I made oath to bring you to the gallows, but to save your victims, I was forced to let you die, as I believed, in another way."

"Why the poison I gave you did not kill you God knows, and how you and those two wretches escaped the sea and now stand before me, I cannot understand; but your having escaped death proves to me that I will yet keep my oath, and I rejoice now that you live, so that one day I may see you die upon the gallows."

"By Heaven you shall not live to see that day, for I will board this craft and kill you now! Come, lads, follow me!"

He sprung to the side of the vessel, though the effort wrung a cry of pain from him, and the woman saw that his arm hung limp at his side, being evidently broken.

But she thrust the pistol almost in his face and cried:

"Back! or you die."

He knew that she would kill him, and hesitated, and then said:

"You are armed and I am not."

"That I well know; but I could bring those to my aid by a call who would be only too glad to know that you lived."

"Who are they?"

"Merle Monte and his slave."

He shuddered, and asked:

"Did they escape death?"

"Certainly, and they are within call."

"But, Brandt Brentford, once more I am willing to spare your life."

"That you may see me hanged?" he sneered.

"Yes, for that purpose only; but will you obey me to save your crime-accursed life?"

"Yes."

"And your men?"

"Will obey me."

"Then hear me."

"Upon the starboard quarter hangs a boat that is not injured, and in it, as you should know, as you always keep your boats stored in readiness for an emergency, are provisions and a water-cask, with a mast, sails and oars."

"You are a good seaman, and can readily reach some port in it, so I will lower it into the sea, you can swim round and get into it, and thus make your escape."

"How can you do this without Monte and his slave hearing you?"

"They are asleep in the cabin."

"I do not believe you."

"Then I shall call them, and leave you in their hands."

"Captain, let us take the boat, sir," said one of the men, anxiously.

"Yes, captain, for you can return here with more men," whispered the other man, but it reached the quick ears of the woman.

Brandt stood a moment in silence, and was evidently pondering deeply.

At last he said:

"Belle Denham, I would risk death gladly to be able to kill you, for you have dogged my steps like a bloodhound, and your disguises are so perfect and remarkable that I fear you, I frankly confess."

"But I have escaped your snares and shall so continue to do, and now I take your advice."

"I believe that Merle Monte and the slave are dead, and that we four are all that are left of those on board the cutter when she struck, for the craft, as I can see, is a perfect wreck."

"But I'll not risk your pistol to find out, and shall leave you here alone."

"The island will not sink, and with another craft and crew I can find it."

"Now, woman, lower away that boat, and we will bid you farewell."

"Swim round the craft until you come under it," she commanded.

"We are bruised and bleeding from being dashed against the rocks, and my arm is broken," answered Brandt.

"I am glad that it is not your neck; but I have the joy yet before me of seeing a rope break that when you dangle from the yard-arm."

"Come you! hold your tongue, and let us cross the deck to the boat."

"I will not, so swim around."

"I tell you we are not able."

"Then stay where you are until Merle Monte awakes, and, finding you alive, turns you over to the tender mercy of his slave."

A muttered curse came from the chief at this, and the three men stepped to the edge of the reef and, dropping into the sea, swam around as the woman had directed.

She sprung upon the bulwarks and followed, watching them closely, and coming to the davits where hung the boat, unfastened the tackle that held it and lowered it into the sea, going from bow to stern and lowering away a foot at a time.

It made a creaking sound several times, and she paused, and leaning over said:

"If the sound awakens them swim to yonder point, and I will tell them I wish to go ashore alone and will bring the boat to you there."

But as no sound came from the cabin she kept on with her work, the two sleepers being too tired to stir, and if hearing were too accustomed to such sounds, without waking to a full sense of where they were, to be disturbed by them.

At last the boat touched the water, and clambering over the gunwale the two men cut her loose and drew on board their sorely wounded chief.

Then, without a word to the woman they moved slowly away out upon the moonlit waters, until, feeling the wind they stepped the little mast, spread the sail, and away flew the small craft holding the destinies of one who had a second time been saved, that he might die upon the gallows, brought there by a woman's hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TREASURE ISLAND.

UNTIL the boat had disappeared wholly from sight, and even the glimmer of the white sail could be no more seen flashing in the moonlight, the woman stood watching its course.

With the daring for which he had always been noted, Brandt, the Buccaneer, had guided the boat out through the foam-capped rocks, and gaining a safe offing had set sail.

"Yes, he is going to Vera Cruz," muttered Little Belt; as she saw the course he steered.

"Oh what a strange being I am," she murmured.

"That man's death I crave more than all else in the world, and yet, when I could have sent a bullet through his heart, I did not do it."

"Ay, when I could have given him over to that savage slave Mezrak to torture, I would not do so, but let him live on and on to do more evil, to stain the bright blue waters with more blood, that some day I might revel in the sight of seeing him swung up to the yard-arm and feel that I had brought him there and gained my revenge in its fullest depths."

"When I poisoned his wine I felt that it was a tame way to let him die."

"But what a creature have I become, to shed three-score beings before their Maker, as I did a few hours ago, and yet not even shudder at the act!"

"And now, with that man alive, and going hence to do more harm in the world, I can calmly lay me down to sleep."

She gave another searching glance over the waters as she spoke, and then turning slowly left the deck and descended into the cabin.

The lamp had burned out its oil, and only the moonlight's rays came down the companionway, but still Merle and Mezrak slept soundly, and noiselessly she crept through to her state-room and threw herself down to sleep.

A moment after she too slumbered, and it was hours when she awoke.

Then she sprung to her feet, for it was

daylight, and she saw without the rays of sunshine.

Arising, she took from her pocket a small cake of some hard substance, and moistening it she rubbed it upon her face.

After awhile the white skin began to show through the black dye, and ere long the soft, marble-like complexion of the woman was visible in all its purity and beauty.

Going upon deck she discovered Merle standing by the port quarter idly gazing out upon the island, and she touched him upon the arm.

So noiseless had been her approach that he had not heard her, and starting, he turned quickly, his hand dropping upon one of Brandt's swords which he had buckled on.

At first he seemed surprised, when the black face was no longer confronting him; but recalling in a second all that had passed and all she had told him, he politely raised his hat and said:

"Good-morning. I hope you slept well, madam."

"Call me Little Belt, please, for I like that best, and remember, should we meet others, to you and Mezrak alone am I to be known as other than what I seem."

"Certainly, Little Belt, if you so wish it; but as I did not hear you stirring I judge you rested well, and, as for myself, I awoke half an hour ago to find Mezrak gone."

"Where has he gone?" she quickly asked.

"Ashore, I suppose, for, as you see, we are on a reef that one can easily walk to the island upon."

"Yes, so I see; but is not the cutter a wreck?" and she glanced over the shattered craft by daylight.

"Yes; it could not be worse, unless it had gone to pieces, and with the first blow from the westward the hull will break up; but we'll make use of her timbers to repair our quarters on shore, and she will furnish us some luxuries, for I believe you told me you were tired of the world and wished to remain here with Mezrak and myself."

"Yes, I did say so; but there comes your slave now."

She pointed as she spoke to where Mezrak was visible coming slowly along the shore.

Ever and anon he would pause by a dead seaman lying upon the rocks and sandy beach, and after turning him over with his foot would continue on toward the vessel.

Mezrak was now plainly visible, making his way back to the wreck, and Merle and Little Belt allowed their gaze to wander over the island.

It was not a cheerful spot by any means, for the shores were one mass of jagged rocks, reefs surrounded it on all sides, and in the interior it looked black and forbidding, for no tree anywhere met the eye, and only a few stunted bushes were visible.

"For all that this island looks so barren, Little Belt, over in the center of yonder hill of stone is a home I dearly love."

"There are a few trees there, hidden from view by the rocks, a spring of crystal water, a large cavern, a cabin built of the ship timber of my father's vessel, and riches enough to make me rival a king," and Merle gazed with real admiration upon the bleak scene; but then it was his home, and he loved it as dearly as others love their palaces and vine-clad cottages.

The woman watched him closely as he gazed upon the island, and asked:

"Then you would not wish to leave this island home?"

"No; I frankly confess I would not, for outside of here I have nothing to live for."

"But do you not fear that some one will find this island, and rob you of your treasure?"

"Why, no; for no one from any passing vessel would care to land upon this bleak-looking island, and did they do so they could not find the treasure, and of course would not suspect any was here."

"You are mistaken, Senor Monte, for there is one who now already contemplates coming here to despoil you of your treasure."

"Indeed! How know you this?"

"From his own lips."

"Who is it, may I ask?"

"Brandt, the Buccaneer," was the woman's low reply, and it caused Merle to give a violent start, in spite of his nerve.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE BELT'S CONFESSION.

"WHY, that man is certainly dead," cried Merle, when Little Belt had spoken the name of the famous chief, whom the youth had seen pinioned and washed off the deck in a half-dazed way the night before.

"He is not," was the calm reply; but before more could be said Mezrak, with a mighty bound, threw himself upon the deck and saluted his master.

The deformed Abyssinian, in spite of his surroundings, was dressed with his usual care, and in the full Persian garb, which showed that he had been searching his wardrobe on the island.

But what seemed to more particularly catch the eye of both Merle and Little Belt was that the jewel-hilted cimeter he wore was stained with blood.

"There is blood on your blade, Mezrak," said Merle, with an air of interest.

"True, master; it is the blood of our foes," was the calm reply.

"Ha! there are then foes on the island?"

"There were, master."

"How many?"

"There were half a score who yet lived; but I put them to death with my sword," was the cool reply.

"Seamen of the pirate craft?"

"Yes, master."

"And all are dead now?"

"All, master."

"Did you see many bodies?"

"About all who came with us, master."

"And tell me what of the chief?"

"I found him not, master."

"Was he not mangled beyond recognition?"

"Had I seen the body of the chief, master, I should have known it."

"I told you that Brandt, the Buccaneer, still lived," said Little Belt, impressively.

"True; but did you mean it?" asked Merle.

"I am not one to joke upon such a subject, and I repeat that Brandt Brentford is alive."

"But how knew you this?"

"I have seen him."

"Since we struck here last night?"

"Yes."

"In Heaven's name, when?"

"Shortly after midnight."

"But you were in the cabin all night," urged Merle.

"You are mistaken, for I came on deck, unable to sleep."

"Without awakening Mezrak or myself."

"You were sleeping most soundly, and I did not disturb you."

"While standing here, looking at the ruin I had caused, I saw three men swimming for the reef."

"They reached it, and came to the side of the vessel, and then I saw Brandt, the Buccaneer, and two of his men."

"Ha! do you hear that, Mezrak?"

"Yes, master."

"And he is here on the island, so your prayer for revenge will be answered," and Merle spoke with some excitement, while the eyes of the slave glanced with hatred and anticipated joy commingled.

"No, Brandt is not upon the island," remarked Little Belt.

"But how could he escape?"

"In a boat that swung from yonder davits."

"Little Belt, pray solve all this mystery quickly for me," said Merle, impatiently.

"I will solve it by saying that as much as I rejoice that I saved you and your slave from death by torture, so much do I now rejoice that Brandt, the Buccaneer, has escaped death, for, finding him last night with a broken arm, though alive and almost himself, I cut the boat from the davits, and bade him and his two comrades depart."

"In God's name why did you do this?" cried Merle, while the eyes of Mezrak flashed viciously upon the woman.

"To yet hang him to the yard-arm of an American man-of-war, as I have sworn to do," was the savage rejoinder of the woman, and with this Merle and his slave were compelled to be satisfied, for she would give no other.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S PLOT.

REMEMBERING that the strange woman, in carrying out her revenge upon the pirate chief, had certainly saved the lives of himself and Mezrak, Merle Monte uttered no word of reproach against her for having set his arch enemy free, although he seemed to feel that he would be again upon his track.

But Mezrak said, sadly:

"Ah, master, this island is no longer our home."

"How mean you, Mezrak?" asked Merle.

"This vessel was run in here, and another can do the same."

"But this craft is a wreck."

"True, master, but she came in in a storm, while another vessel will come near, when the sea is calm, send her boats in, and our secret is known."

"I believe you are right, Mezrak," said Merle Monte.

"I know he is right," remarked Little Belt, turning from the bulwark upon which she had been leaning.

"But what is to be done?"

"Leave the island," answered Little Belt.

"But how?"

"There lies a boat that can be easily repaired."

"True, but that will do no good."

"Why?"

"It would sink under one-tenth of my treasure."

The woman started, and asked:

"Is it so great as that?"

"Yes."

"Then the boat can carry us from the island?"

"And leave my treasure to fall into the hands of the man who has hunted me down for it?"

"Can it not be concealed, so that he cannot find it?"

"What say you, Mezrak?"

"No, master."

"There is no way, Mezrak, that you can hide it upon this island?" asked Little Belt.

"Not from the foe of my master, for, did we sink it in the sea near the island, he would find it."

"I believe you, Mezrak, so we must try some other plan."

"I can think of none," said Merle.

"All three were silent for a moment, and each one was plotting some means of escape, and of saving the treasure.

At last the woman's eyes flashed, and Merle and Mezrak knew that she had hit upon some plan.

"What is it?" he asked, as she turned toward him, her face flushed.

"That boat will carry you and I from this island," she said, eagerly, pointing to the yawl, which had been lashed to the deck between the masts, and was slightly stove in.

"Yes, and Mezrak?"

"No, only you and I."

"And leave Mezrak here?"

"Yes."

"I will not do it."

"You will, for he cannot be disguised as you and I can."

"But for what motive?"

"To guard the treasure until our return."

"Where will we go?"

"To Vera Cruz."

"For what purpose?"

"To get a vessel."

"A vessel?"

"Yes, one that can carry the treasure, and is swift enough to show a clean pair of heels to any pursuer."

"Your idea is a good one, but such a craft is not easy to find."

"I know of one, but it is not in Vera Cruz."

"Where, then?"

"In Havana."

"But it doubtless belongs to Spain."

"She was built for the Government to send dispatches and treasure to and from Spain to Cuba."

"Then how know you the craft is in the harbor of Havana?"

"She was not to be completed until about this time."

"I see; but how can I get possession of her, even if she should be there?"

"Money will buy anything," was the laconic response.

"But not from a Government?"

"Well, from those who serve a Government."

"You are a strange woman, and I have half a mind to follow your advice and go to Havana; but I will not leave Mezrak here alone."

"You trust him wholly?"

"As I would myself; but if Brandt, the Buccaneer, should return before I get back to the island, then poor Mezrak's fate would be a sad one."

"But you will not leave him alone."

"Little Belt, you speak in riddles," somewhat impatiently said Merle.

"Have you forgotten that I told you I had locked half a score or more of the crew in the hold?"

"Ha! I had forgotten it."

"They were men I felt I could trust, and I spared them, and now they can remain here until your return with your vessel and another crew."

"I intend to be no pirate, so that the crew here will be sufficient for my vessel, if I get one," said Merle.

"As you please about that; but it will be well to have men enough to defend your craft, should accident place you in dangerous situations where it was necessary."

"True; but I'll tell you what I'll do, Little Belt."

"I am listening."

"I like your plot, and I'll give you the gold, or gems to buy a craft at any price, and you can take these men here with you to bring her back, for I know you to be a thorough sailor."

"And you?"

"I will not desert Mezrak," was the firm reply.

"It will be better for you to go, as Mezrak can tear the wreck to pieces, so that no passing vessel may see it, and the men can help him."

"They will not be treacherous, knowing you are to return, and having no way to leave the island, should they prove so."

"But Brandt may return."

"And will, but he goes ashore without money, and has a craft and a crew to get."

"You have gold, and can readily buy all that you wish, and long before Brandt can return you can be away with your treasure."

"Your plan is a good one, Little Belt, and I will do as you say."

"Now let us open the hold and see the men you have saved from death, and I will set them at once to repairing the yawl."

The woman smiled, as though delighted at gaining her point, and a few moments after,

out of the hold came a youth with a bright, saucy face, and behind him half a score of men who had evidently believd that the sands of their lives had about run out.

CHAPTER XI.

A PAIR OF TRAITORS.

WHEN Brandt, the Buccaneer, sailed from the Treasure Island that moonlight night, he had already sworn in his heart to return before very long and yet gain the riches he knew it held.

The more he thought over the matter, the more he was convinced that the woman, Belle Denham, the name she had borne when he won her love to cruelly trample it under foot, had some sinister motive in getting him away from the island.

"She wants the treasure for herself," he muttered, as the boat sailed along, while he held the tiller with one hand, and seemed unmindful that his arm was broken, so intensely wrought up were his feelings.

"I believe," he continued, "that Merle Monte and the negro are dead, for they were chained when the vessel struck, and the taffrail and bulwarks astern were all torn away, I noticed, by the waves."

"But she has some one in her confidence, and whoever it is, she intends shall share the treasure with her."

"Ah! what a fiendishly clever woman she is, to dog my steps and deceive me, as she has done, with her numerous disguises."

"Why, I would have sworn that she was in reality a negr' boy, when she so deceived me under the name of Black Diamond."

"Curse her! I'll yet give her a fearful payment for the revenge debts I owe her."

"By Heaven! I'll put back now to the island and care all, be it what it may."

"Forward, there! haul in this sheet, for I shall go about."

The two men were evidently taken by surprise at this order, but made no movement to obey.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes, captain."

"Why in Satan's name do you not obey?"

"Do you mean to return to the island?" asked one.

"Yes."

"We won't go back."

"What! do you dare disobey me?" yelled Brandt, wild with rage.

"Yes, for our lives are worth something to us, and we don't owe it to you, captain, that we are alive now," said one.

"No; and you owe it to us, sir, for when we came across you in the water with your broken arm, you would have gone down to Davy Jones's locker but for us!" added the other.

"By Heaven! I care not for your wishes, and I command you to obey."

"And we refuse."

"Then I'll hurl you into the sea," and the maddened pirate chief arose and daringly stepped toward the men, as though to carry out his threat.

"Hold on, Captain Brandt!"

The man's tone was such as to impress the chief with its earnestness, and he paused.

"I found in the boat a pair of pistols and a cutlass, and you are not on your own deck now, and are at our mercy, so don't threaten us."

Brandt saw the moon glimmer upon the firearms, and did pause, for he knew he was wholly at the mercy of the two men.

Had they not been armed, even hurt as he was, he would have sprung upon them, having full confidence in his giant strength; but as it was, he would not face certain death, so sunk back in the stern-sheets with the remark:

"You are right, my men, and I was mad to think of returning to certain death."

"But you don't think there is anybody alive on the island excepting that nigger boy"

whom you tried to say was a woman?" said one of the men.

"That is all I believe to be there, and we could easily make ourselves masters of the island."

"I guess we'll wait until we get more men to back us, captain."

"It will be the best plan," was the reply of Brandt and he settled back to his own meditations once more.

And thus the night and the following day passed away, Brandt still keeping at the helm, and holding along the coast, against the wishes of the men, who had several times seen a settlement upon the distant shores.

When night came, utterly worn out with suffering and fatigue, he was forced to yield the tiller to one of the men, while he sought rest.

Directing the man how to steer, he lay down in the stern-sheets, and was soon fast asleep.

Then in whispers the two men talked together, and what they said boded no good for the chief.

"There is a light, lad, and it's ashore; and though I'm no navigator, I am sailor enough to run this craft there," said he.

"But what will the captain say, for he does not wish to land yet?" asked the other.

"I'll not ask him, and besides, if we get into port, and he raises a crew and gets a ship, which he will do, why back to the Treasure Island he'll go, and we will get a few hundred pesos as our share."

"Right you are there, shipmate."

"I know I am, and I think we might get the treasure and do the dividing."

"How do you mean?"

"We could get a ship and crew as well as the captain, for he has no money now."

"True, shipmate."

"Then let us do so."

"Can't we bind the captain and run him in and get the gold offered for him?"

"No, that won't do, for we are pirates, too, and I won't risk it."

"Well, what shall we do?"

"Hoist him overboard, and with his broken arm, he'll soon sink, and then we'll make the land, and play shipwrecked sailors, until we can get to Vera Cruz, and I guess a little good talk will soon fit us out with a craft, and a good crew to man her, and then, my lad, ho for the Treasure Island."

"Do you mean it?"

"See if I don't."

With these words, the treacherous pirate seized the sleeping form of the chief in his arms and hurled him into the sea.

CHAPTER XII.

NOT BORN TO BE DROWNED.

So thoroughly exhausted was the Pirate Chief, that he sunk into the cold water of the sea before he awakened to a sense of his danger.

Then, with a vigorous stroke of his able arm, he rose to the surface, and saw the boat gliding serenely away from him, for it was bright moonlight.

His first thought was that he had been thrown out by a lurch of the boat from a sudden squall; but a glance showed him that only a four-knot breeze was blowing, and that there had not been wind enough pass over to dip the gunwales of the stanch little craft.

Then it occurred to him that the two seamen were asleep and the craft had suddenly broached to.

But no, the boat was holding steadily on her course away from him.

All these thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain, and then came the idea that he had been thrown into the sea.

Instantly his clear, ringing hail went across the waters:

"Ho! ho! the boat ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" floated back to him.

"Return and pick me up!" he cried. No answer came, and he called out:

"Are you traitors to me, that you leave me thus to die?"

"We are looking out for ourselves, Captain Brandt, and you can do the same!" came the sullen response.

"Yes; they have left me here to drown, curse them!" he said, in strangely calm tones for a man in his horrible situation.

But he was too proud to beg for mercy, and remained silent while the little boat with his two traitor sailors glided further and further away.

His broken arm gave him intense pain, but this he did not seem to feel, and quietly he scanned the sea, keeping himself gently moving, which he could do readily with one hand, as he was an expert swimmer.

His eye soon detected the distant light, and, as he rose upon the crest of a wave, he tried to calculate the distance.

"Fully three leagues away," he muttered, and then added.

"Too far for me to reach, crippled as I am."

Then he glanced shoreward, and dimly visible afar off was the dark outline of the land.

"The land is nearer off here, and yet I cannot reach it, for I cannot hold up very long."

"But I don't despair yet," he grimly and pluckily said.

Thus an hour passed, and then, just as the past, with all its grim, horrible phantoms began to troop up before him, and he knew that he was looking death squarely in the face, for he could hold out but a few moments longer, he caught sight of a sail.

"Hail! it is the boat returning for me!" he cried.

"They have relented and will pick me up; but I shall not ask it of them," was his bold decision.

Nearer came the sail, and then his keen eyes detected that it was not the boat he had left the island in.

"Why, it is a large craft, and my eyes must be fearfully dimmed by salt water to make the mistake," he said.

And still nearer came the strange sail, and then he saw that it was a large vessel, gliding gracefully along under full sail.

Her course lay near him, and yet she might pass him by.

His eyes were too dimmed to see just what she was, and she might be a vessel-of-war, and then his days would only end at the yard-arm if he was recognized.

But death was certain there for he could not hold up five minutes longer he well knew, and so raising his voice he took the chances and hailed loudly:

"Ship ahoy!"
No answer came to his hail.

"Ship ahoy! ahoy!"
Still no answer, and his hope and despair so close together, caused great beads of sweat to stand upon his forehead.

"Ahoy! ship ahoy! ahoy! Ho! the ship, ahoy!"

Like the ringing notes of a trumpet his splendid voice rung out, and instantly he heard a commotion on board, and then came the answer:

"Whereaway? Who hails?"
A shipwrecked sailor, adrift in the water.

"Here, off your port quarter," was shouted back in the tones that had often thrilled his pirate crew in many a red combat.

"Ay, ay! Keep up heart, and I'll send you a boat," came from the ship.

A moment after, with remarkable celerity, a boat was lowered, and came pulling rapidly toward the drowning man.

Nearer and nearer it came, but the dimmed eyes could not see it, for the pirate's strength was rapidly failing.

Nearer and nearer, until he heard it almost

upon him, and then from his lips broke the words:

"By Heaven! but I was not born to be drowned."

A laugh at his pluck broke from those in the boat, and the next instant he was drawn on board.

But he was insensible, for even his human nature could stand no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS PAIR.

A VESSEL of great beauty was flying along over the waters, some weeks after the scenes related in the foregoing chapter, and her course lay for the Havana, the frowning fortress of which was just discernible in the far distance.

The craft was of schooner rig, and yet was remarkably long for a vessel carrying but two masts.

Her hull was low, very narrow, and her bows as sharp as a razor.

Her sails were of vast dimensions, her masts extremely tall, and her spars long and slender.

She was painted black, excepting a narrow ribbon of crimson that encircled her hull, and her masts and spars were of the same somber hue, but the ends were enlivened by red paint, which gave the craft a peculiar appearance.

An armed vessel she certainly was, though no ports were pierced in her bulwarks, and no guns were visible along her broadsides; but fore and aft were two heavy forty-twos, mounted upon pivots, and three cannon of large caliber, seemed ample, either for chasing or escaping a foe.

Upon her decks a crew was visible, not numbering over forty men, and they were dressed in black, with red band around the cap, and a red sash.

But upon the quarter-deck stood a group of uniformed gentlemen, who were evidently not the officers of the vessel, and in fact they were but invited guests, for the strange craft, which was making nine knots out of a six-knot breeze, was a Spanish dispatch-boat just completed, and on her trial trip before the Government purchased her from her builders.

All on board were delighted with her, and the report that would be made to the Captain-General, upon the return from the cruise of a day would certainly result in a handsome price being paid for the craft.

As the castle of El Moro came higher out of the waters, and the captain had just announced that in three hours the Red Belt would drop anchor in the harbor, a black cloud soared up above the horizon.

As all watched its rapid spreading over the skies, and knew that it portended a storm, and perhaps one of those fearful tornadoes so frequent in the latitude of the Gulf, there came from the foretop the cry in Spanish:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" called out the captain, his eyes not catching sight of a single bit of canvas upon the broad expanse of waters, other than that above his decks.

"Dead ahead, señor capitán," was the answer of the lookout.

"Ah! I see it. 'Tis a little boat and heading toward Havana.

"It must be a shipwrecked crew.

"Keep her so as to run within pistol shot, helmsman, for we must take them aboard to escape this storm," said the captain.

The helmsman obeyed, and in a short time it was seen that the craft was a small, but trim yawl, carrying a tiny sail, and with but two occupants in it.

One of them sat at the helm and was a youth in the white duck suit worn by the American coast planters at that time, and the other was a negro boy.

"Ho the yawl!" shouted the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir," came the answer.

"Where from and whither bound?"

"I was blown off the Florida coast in a gale, and am bound for the nearest port of safety," was the response in good Spanish.

"Will you let us pick you up, for yonder storm will burst soon?"

"Yes, thank you, I will be only too glad."

The schooner was luffed up into the wind until her sails flapped, and the yawl was laid alongside most skillfully, and upon the vessel's deck stepped Merle Monte and Little Belt, the former in the attire of a planter, and the latter wearing once more her disguise of a negro boy.

The captain of the Red Belt received Merle at the gangway, just as he cast his yawl adrift, and welcomed him on board, at the same time introducing himself to him, for he felt that he was in the presence of a gentleman, though one in misfortune.

"My name is Monteith, sir, and with my slave here, I was sailing off the coast where I live, when I was blown out to sea and had to scud before the gale, and you see where it has brought me."

"Had I not had a few stores on board we would have suffered greatly," said Merle in a free and easy way.

The captain congratulated him upon his escape, introduced him to his guests, and all admired the elegant young American planter, as he was supposed to be.

A short while after the arrival of Merle and Diamond on board, the tornado struck the sea, and the beautiful vessel, stripped to meet it, rode out the terrific gale as securely as though at anchor in a harbor.

"You are certain, Diamond, that this is the schooner you had reference to?" asked Merle, addressing Little Belt, who stood near him while the storm was raging, for the youth had declined to go below with the guests and escape the fury of the gale.

"It is, for I cannot be mistaken, and her builder is the stout, English-looking man, if he has not sold her to the Government," was the reply.

"Well, if he has not, I will have her, cost what she may," was the determined reply.

"She sails like the wind, as you saw, Senor Merle, and rides out this storm as though she was in port."

"She does indeed," answered Merle, and, as the danger was over, he began to talk with the captain about his vessel.

"She is a Government cruiser, doubtless?" he asked.

"She was built by a private contractor as a model, and I suppose the Government will purchase her, as she is now on her trial trip, and the naval officials are on board; but her price is high," said the captain.

"What does her owner ask for her?" inquired Merle.

"Here he is, sir, and you can ask him," was the reply.

Merle put the query, and the answer was:

"Thirty thousand pesos, Senor Americano, and the naval commandante says it is too much."

"Indeed! I think her cheap, and will give you fifty thousand," was Merle's cool reply.

The owner of the beautiful vessel looked at him in surprise, and then glanced at his supposed negro boy and back again at the youth.

"Do you mean it, senor?" he queried, while his eyes glittered with delight.

"I do, sir."

The owner called the captain and whispered to him the offer, and that personage gazed at Merle and Diamond in surprise.

After a moment's conversation together, the captain said:

"Pardon me, senor, but you appear a mere boy in years."

"I am nothing more in reality, sir," was the cold reply.

"And we picked you up at sea, sir."

"Yes."

"In an open boat, senor!"

"True."

"With only your negro slave!"

"Yes, sir."

"Pardon me again, Senor Americano, but while I know that all of the planters on your coast are very rich, it surprises me that one so young as you are can offer such an immense sum for a vessel."

"Yet I make the offer in good faith."

"What would you wish with the vessel, Senor Monteith?"

"That, senor capitán, I do not consider your affair."

The Spaniard winced and looked at the owner of the vessel, who suggested:

"Perhaps for a pleasure craft for the senor?"

"Yes, I want it for my own pleasure, and I offer you more than your price."

"Far more, senor."

"Will you take my offer?"

"When is the payment to be made?"

"When I land in Havana."

"Yes, Senor Americano, I will take your offer," said the owner; and turning to the captain he continued:

"I know the commandante intended taking the craft, but wished me to fall in my price, if he could make me do so."

"We must now make them all believe that the schooner is unseaworthy, too long for her breadth of beam, too deep for her low-lying hull, and in fact no sea-boat at all."

"I'll go below and frighten them all, captain, while you make her jump about like a chip in a mill-race, for the vessel's sold to this mysterious American and his equally mysterious slave."

"Yes, they are a mysterious pair," said the captain, and then he set to work to make the schooner behave so badly, that the Spanish officials in the cabin crossed themselves, counted their beads, and swore that the beautiful craft was all right in a dead calm, but in a blow was nothing more than a floating coffin; and when at last she dropped anchor, pale with fright, but thankful for their safety, they ventured ashore in disgust with the owner of the schooner and her strange model.

But soon after his wounded feelings were healed by a sum in Spanish bank notes of nearly double his price for her, and Merle Monte was the owner and captain of the much abused schooner Red Belt.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO SPIES.

"WELL, Senor Americano, I suppose you will wish me for your captain, or, at least, desire me to run your vessel over to your shores for you?" said the Spanish captain of the Red Belt when he had seen Merle, after an hour's absence on shore, return on board and pay the schooner's owner the sum he had agreed to give.

"No, thank you, senor, but I will be my own captain," replied Merle.

"But you are too young, senor, to be a navigator, or thorough sailor."

"I was old enough to run a yawl with only Black Diamond here as an assistant, many a long mile, senor, through rough weather and calm, and I do not fear not being able to take my new purchase to her destination."

"But you will need an under officer, and I will gladly serve in that capacity for good pay and a clipper-ship passage back to Havana," still urged the Spanish captain.

"Thank you, no. I shall need no under officer, senor."

"But a boatswain and crew, you certainly will—"

"I certainly will select my own crew, senor."

"Allow me to suggest, senor, that you engage my friend here, the captain, and his crew," put in the former owner of the schooner.

Merle's face flushed with anger, but he said, quietly:

"Do you consider that you have sold this craft?"

"I do."

"You have your money?"

"I have."

"You engaged this captain and crew for yourself?"

"I did, senor."

"Then be so good as to at once go ashore, and order this captain and his crew to accompany you."

The two men looked at each other in surprise.

The purchaser of the Red Belt was certainly a most mysterious personage.

Then they turned their gaze upon the handsome young negro, Black Diamond.

That personage was smiling, and showing his even, milky-white teeth.

But still the two men sat in the schooner's cabin.

They had received far more than the worth of the vessel, but they were curious to know more of this waif they had picked up at sea.

Seeing this determination in their faces, Merle arose and said:

"Senor, this is my vessel, and if you do not leave it, bag and baggage, crew and all, I will at once report to the Captain-General your trick to defraud the Government out of the Red Belt, because I needed the craft enough to pay you nearly double the sum you expected to get for her."

"I give you five minutes to decide whether you will go or stay."

"But, my dear Senor Americano, we are most friendly toward you, and only wish—"

"Will you go?"

"Now, senor, don't be angry, but listen to—"

"Diamond, go at once to the *palacio* of the Captain-General and ask him to send an officer and squad of marines on board of this vessel, where he shall hear of something that—"

"No, no, senor, I beg of you not to send that polished piece of ebony off on any such an errand, for we go at once."

"See, we depart."

"Come, captain, the vessel is sold, and we have no right here."

"Adios, Senor Americano," and the late proprietor of the Red Belt hastened from the cabin, followed with ludicrous alacrity by the captain, who at once mustered his crew and had them all set on shore.

But he turned to one of his men, the boatswain, and a dark-faced sinister-looking fellow and said:

"Pedro, get a man to board that craft and see if he can ship on her."

"If so, let him get more men berths aboard, and mind you, he must learn all about that mysterious youth who claims to be an American and yet speaks Spanish like a grandee of Spain."

"I am curious to know more of him."

The boatswain at once departed upon his errand, and visiting a *pulperia** soon found the man he wanted for the work.

"Go on board, Vincente," he said, "and find out what is up, and if the craft is going on a cruise for doublets let me know and I'll enlist too."

"If you think we can take her for our own purpose, just say so, and I'll board with a precious lot of cutthroats, as you knew I can."

"Yes, Pedro; I know you can get a crew for any flag, and I'll find out the colors of the stranger very soon."

The man addressed as Vincente was a Cuban, and possessed a dark, handsome face, full-bearded, and with an expression that was cruel and cunning lurking about the mouth.

He was well-dressed in sailor rig, and moved off with a graceful swing toward the shore.

* A Spanish wine and lodging house.

Arriving there, he called to a shore boat to row him off to the schooner.

Upon the deck stood Merle and Little Belt, they alone being on board, and they were discussing the best plan of getting a small crew to run the schooner back to Treasure Island, when Vincente came alongside, and politely touching his cap, asked:

"Senor capitán, do you want a sailor for a berth on board?"

"Come on board, my man," ordered Merle.

"Yes, I want a man like you, and I need about ten more good lads."

"Do you think you can ship them for me?"

"Yes, senor; but for what service?" asked Vincente.

"For a service that will pay them well."

"I'll go, senor, if I have to take hard knocks to earn my pay, and I can get you a crew to suit you."

"How many did you say?"

"Ten men besides yourself."

"All right, senor."

"Bring them off to-night at four bells, for I wish to sail with the midnight tide."

"Yes, senor," and the Cuban re-entered his boat and rowed ashore, while he muttered:

"That is the very youth Captain Brandt wished to capture, to make him tell the secret of where he had buried some great treasure."

"By the saints! but Carlos Vincente, you shall wring the secret from him, unless you discover it by his sailing to his island, where his riches must become your riches."

"Ha! ha! I guess I'll give old Boatswain Pedro the slip on this, and take my own crew on board."

CHAPTER XV.

SHIPPING A CREW.

"LITTLE BELT, I believe I have seen that man before," said Merle Monte, as Vincente rowed away from the schooner's side.

"And I have seen him also."

"Where?"

"He was one of the crew of Brandt, the Buccaneer, in the fight in the lagoon where you captured the cutter."

"By Neptune! but you are right."

"I recall the circumstance now, and how well he fought."

"Then he is a villain."

"Of course."

"And will you take him on board now?"

"Certainly."

"And the crew he brings?"

"By all means."

"You run a great risk."

"In what way?"

"You may lose the schooner and your own life, too."

"Not I."

"How can you prove it, if they rise in mutiny and seize the vessel?"

"I will show you, Little Belt."

"You take command until my return."

Springing into the dingy, Merle sculled himself rapidly ashore, and walked up into a quarter of Havana which was only occupied by seafaring men and their families.

Stopping at one of the *pulperias* he entered, and asked for the landlord.

That worthy, or rather unworthy, for he was a villainous-looking wretch, soon made his appearance.

"What does the senor desire?" he asked, politely, seeing by the appearance of his visitor that there was a chance to make a *peso* or two.

"I need a crew of ten men for some work that will pay."

"Under what flag, senor?"

"That is no more your business than it is of the men, if they consent to ship," was the haughty reply.

"Ah! the senor intends to select his own flag?"

"The senor will do as he deems best."

"Can you furnish the men?"

"Yes, senor."

"When?"

"Within the hour."

"I want no cowards."

"With gold at stake, senor, all men are brave."

"Very well, bring them to me on board the schooner Red Belt just after dark."

"Let no man know where he is going, and be careful that no one sees you come on board."

"Yes, senor; but is not that the craft built for the Government?"

"It is a craft which was built for the Government, but which I bought."

"Here is gold for you, and I'll double it if you serve me faithfully."

The man giggled outright at the generous sum placed in his hand, and reminding him of the time, and to be discreet, Merle Monte took his leave.

"Well, Little Belt, has any one been on board?" asked Merle, as he rowed back to the schooner, and was met at the gangway by the cleverly-disguised woman.

"Not any one," was the reply, and then Merle told of his trip on shore, and the two kept watch for the coming of the crew.

It was just after dark fell upon the harbor, and the lights began to twinkle from a hundred vessels, that a large boat was seen approaching the schooner.

"Red Belt ho!" came in seaman-like tones:

"Ahoy the boat!"

"What do you want?" asked Merle in reply.

"To see the senor capitán, for I have a batch of lambs for him to take to sea."

Merle recognized the voice of the landlord of the *pulperia* he had visited, and ordered him alongside.

"I have the lads for you, senor, and all of them a precious lot, I can pledge you."

Merle led the way into the cabin, and when the cabin lamp fell upon the half-score seamen, he felt, indeed, that the landlord had spoken the truth, for they were, in fact, as precious a lot, if their faces were any criterion, as even Brandt, the Buccaneer, could desire.

"Men, I need you for a special service, and your quarters are in those two state-rooms.

"Your arms will be given you when I have work for you to do, and then I shall expect you to obey my orders."

"Mind you, no talking, and not one of you are to leave those state-rooms without my orders."

"Your pay shall be liberal, and if any man does not care to serve with me, let him return with the landlord."

There was no dissenting voice; the crew went silently into the state-rooms pointed out by Merle, and the landlord took his leave, happy in the liberal fee he received for his services.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIGHT FOR MASTERY.

It was not very long after the departure of the jubilant landlord of the *pulperia*, before another boat came alongside the Red Belt, and Carlos Vincente appeared over the gangway.

"Well, senor, I have your men."

"I am glad to see you so prompt. Can you depend upon them?" said Merle.

"In anything, senor captain, you may be pleased to command them," was the obsequious response.

"Very well, sir, let them get to their posts, for I get under way at once!"

The new crew sprung to work with a will, the anchor soon left the bottom, the sails were unfurled and set, and the Red Belt darted out of the harbor, left the frowning fortress of El Moro far astern, and rode the billows of the Gulf with a grace that charmed both Merle and Little Belt, while she glided

through the water at a speed that won their admiration.

It was the second evening out of port, the lookout had sighted a sail, and Merle was attentively regarding the stranger through his glass, when Carlos Vincente approached him.

Merle had made him second officer, an honor which the Cuban seemed to greatly enjoy, and coming aft he said:

"Senor captain, do you know yonder craft?"

"She looks like an American," answered Merle.

"You are right, senor, she is an American."

"Do you know her?"

"I do, senor."

"What is she?"

"The swiftest packet-brig in the Gulf, and one which they say Brandt, the Buccaneer, has chased a hundred times, but which was always too light of heel for even his cutter, no matter what wind she sailed with."

"Is it not the Skylark?" asked Merle.

"Yes, senor."

"She frequently carries large sums of gold, I believe."

"So she does, senor captain, and now has on board a large amount I heard she was to sail with on this voyage."

"Well, her gold is nothing to me, Vincente."

"But it is to us, senor captain," was the bold reply of the man.

"How mean you, sirrah?" demanded Merle sternly, and he glanced toward Little Belt, who quietly left the deck, seemingly understanding his look.

"I mean, senor, that I know you now as a fledgling of the American navy, and by carrying you in I can get a price for you as a condemned mutineer, while yonder vessel will pay us well, so I command this craft now, and you go in irons."

Merle did not even look surprised at the strange words of the boatswain, who had so quickly thrown off his mask, but asked, with utmost calmness:

"Am I to understand this as a mutiny?"

"Yes, if so you like it, my handsome young captain," was the bold response.

"And do your men back you up in this lawless stand against your captain?" came the equally as calm question.

"They do."

"Ho, men! and teach this boy that we hold this craft now."

"But harm him not, for there is a price on his head."

At the cry of their leader the mutineer crew came aft at a run, some with pistols and others with swords.

But Merle held his ground firmly, and said sternly:

"Men, return to your posts."

"No!" came in a loud chorus.

"Take him, lads!" cried the boatswain, and the men moved toward Merle Monte, who sprung backward and, drawing his cutlass and pistol, shouted in ringing tones:

"Ho, lads! throw these mutineers into the sea!"

There was a burst of mocking laughter from Vincente and his men at this order, but it changed to a chorus of yells of dismay and rage, when up the companionway two abreast and led by the supposed negro boy dashed a band of armed men, to aid their captain.

Then came the hot fight of rattling pistols and crashing cutlasses, and Merle Monte with his untried crew swept forward and Vincente and his men, unnerved by the turn affairs had taken, were beaten back to the forecastle and cut down without mercy.

"Save that wretch for the yard-arm!" shouted Merle, and Carlos Vincente was dragged to the feet of the young leader, crying for mercy.

But a noose was quickly made in a hal-yard and thrown around his neck, and at a

command from Merle Monte, the pirate and mutineer was hauled up in mid-air, the last one of his band of outlaws.

"Now, lads, you have done well, so spring to your posts and let the Red Belt walk through the water," cried Merle, and taking the helm he held on for the Treasure Island.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE SAIL IN THE OFFING.

IT was night and the sea was wild, the skies overcast and the winds went skurrying along at a forty-knot rate.

The day had been a stormy one, and when the shadows of night fell, the dwellers upon Treasure Island grouped together and anxiously looked out over the waste of waters, for there had been a sail sighted afar off late in the afternoon by Needles, a youth who was the life of the lonely dwellers upon the barren rocks.

"I guess you didn't see no sail, boy," said an old tar who formed one of a group of a dozen men who stood under the shelter of a cliff and were gazing seaward.

The remark was addressed to Needles, who stood near, and the answer came quickly:

"Because you are so old as to be half-blind, Ben Bolt, you shouldn't doubt the eye-sight of those that can see."

All laughed at this excepting Ben Bolt who replied:

"There are good eyes among this party of lads, boy, and no one else could see a sail, not even Mezrak."

"Mezrak was sleeping until night came," said the Abyssinian quietly.

"Well, nobody else who was wide awake saw the sail, and yet Needles swears it was a schooner-rigged craft, heading for the Island.

"But if you had seen it, Mezrak, I would not have doubted," responded Ben Bolt.

"No; and if you had, your fear of the knife Mezrak wears would have made you swear against your own conscience, which I would not do if I died for it."

"I'm bad, I know, for I'm in your lot; but accident got me a berth on a pirate craft, and the gold I have made by it my good old mother gets and thinks I came honestly by it."

"But let me once get the chance to get back to her, and I'd not go pirating again if I could get the gold which Brandt, the Buccaneer, has made."

"But, shipmates, I did not deceive you, for I saw a schooner coming this way, and if your eyes missed it, it was your misfortune and not my fault—Light ho!"

Needles ended his remark with a cry that sent every eye peering off into the darkness, and at once Mezrak cried:

"Ay, ay, lad, it is a vessel's light!"

"Then I was right," triumphantly said the youth.

"You were, Needles, you were!" cried a dozen voices in chorus, while old Ben Bolt said:

"When I am wrong, lad, I owns up, and so I hauls down my flag now."

"You better hoist it again, old man, to greet the return of our captain."

"How know you it is the young captain, lad?" asked Ben Bolt.

"The same way you know there is a storm coming, old man—my bones tell me," was the pert reply.

"Well, if it is not, I'll break your bones for your impertinence, Needles."

"Better clip my tongue, Ben Bolt," laughed Needles, and then he again turned his gaze upon the light, now plainly visible a mile away, and dancing about upon the waves.

Suddenly it seemed to go out; and many said it had been a hallucination, created by a desire to see a coming vessel.

But Mezrak and Needles said no, and the Abyssinian was always authority, as no one dared contradict him.

"See! there is the vessel," said Needles, and this assertion the slave confirmed, though no other eye than his and the lad's seemed to see the craft.

"Yes, it is a schooner, and she is heading inshore; but soon I will know if my master commands her," said Mezrak.

All then waited in breathless suspense, and it was not long before they too saw the vessel, even to old Ben Bolt.

"She is coming in close," said one.

"She has an ugly night for it."

"She is handled well."

"Now, Mezrak, what do you think of her?"

And thus went on the remarks and questions, until at last the Abyssinian said in his calm way:

"In a minute more I will know if it is my master's vessel."

"How, Mezrak?"

"If he is not at the helm she will go to pieces on a reef for which she is heading now."

"And if he is at the helm?"

"Then she will luff up short, go on the starboard tack and hold it right through the reef until she drops anchor in the basin," was the reply of the black.

All breathlessly awaited the result, for were it a strange vessel and her crew to come there, what would be their fate?

Were it a craft over whose destinies Brandt, the Buccaneer, held sway, then they knew they would not be forgiven for having been spared by the one who drove his vessel to wreck and death upon the rocks.

Another moment and a cry burst from every throat, for the strange sail in the offing had luffed up short, just when her bows seemed about to dash upon the sunken reef.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MONSTER OF THE DEEP.

EAGERLY every eye on the Treasure Island watched the strange vessel, as it held on the port tack to the basin, and a sigh of relief came from every lip when the plunge of her anchor was heard that told the story of who was her commander.

That no boat dare come ashore that night all knew, for the waves breaking upon the beach would have broken it in pieces in a second's time; but still there was one who would not wait until the morning to see his master, and that one was Mezrak, the faithful.

Throwing aside his outer clothing, he plunged into the wild waters and immediately disappeared from the sight of those who were watching him.

A powerful swimmer, he urged his way out into the darkness and tempest-lashed sea until at last the vessel loomed up before him.

Having dropped anchor and gotten all in ship-shape for the night, the crew of the vessel were congregated in the forecastle, discussing the courage and skill of their young commander in running the vessel into the basin in safety.

They were the same "precious lot" of the pulperia landlord, minus several who had been killed in the fight for the mastery of the vessel, and, convinced that Merle Monte was the man to be their captain, they had proven a most efficient and willing crew, and their behavior would have certainly been a surprise to the man who shipped them, for he had taken every man who was in arrears to him for lodging, food or liquors.

That Merle Monte was a favorite with his men was evident from the manner in which they discussed him; but, in the midst of their praise of the young commander, they all sprung to their feet with cries of horror.

"Santa Maria!"

"Carramba!"

"Sacre!"

"El Diablo!"

"A black Satan!"

"Holy saints! I am punished for my sins!"

"Spare me, good devill!"

"Run lads, all! for Satan has boarded us."

Such were the wild expressions, prayers and oaths that escaped the lips of the crew, and the advice of the last speaker was taken with a vengeance, at seeing suddenly spring into their midst a huge black form, wet and dripping, and with the look of a monster of the deep.

All started pell-mell for the after part of the ship, wholly forgetful in their fright of quarter-deck discipline and etiquette.

But two unfortunates were unable to escape, and the long arms reached for them, the bony fingers grasped them, and, shaking them as a mastiff would a poodle, he threw them aside and went on his way aft with expressions of anger.

In alarm Merle Monte sprung to his feet and started on deck, rapidly followed by Little Belt, and at the head of the companion-way he met the frightened crew, and brought them to a sudden halt by presenting his cutlass and barring their way.

"What means this fright?" he demanded, sternly.

"The monster of the deep!" yelled one.

Merle glanced beyond the frightened crew, and cried:

"Back to your den, you dogs! That man is my friend, my ever-faithful Mezrak!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GOLD SHIP.

THE crew of the Red Belt shrunk back at the stern command of Merle Monte, and giving Mezrak plenty of sea room, retreated to the forecastle, with another important subject to discuss.

In the mean time Merle entered the cabin with Mezrak and Little Belt, and the former said:

"I told Little Belt you would come out, my good Mezrak, for when I ran in, I felt you would know it was my vessel; but I dared not show a light, or give any sign, for fear Brandt might have arrived before me."

"Has all gone well?"

"Yes, master."

"And the crew?"

"Are in good spirits, and delighted at your return, master."

"Well, Mezrak, we will soon get away from the island, for you see I have a fine craft."

"Yes, master, and I am very glad to see it, for as the days passed and you did not return, I feared you might have gone down in the gales that came after your departure."

"No, Mezrak, we weathered them all, and the yawl behaved nobly, but we met this vessel, and were picked up by her just in time to save ourselves, for I never saw a worse tornado than the one that broke upon us off Havana, and our little boat could never have lived through it."

And until late into the night Merle and Mezrak talked, and then the slave threw himself down to rest upon a rug.

But, with the first glimmer of day, the slave was on his feet, and went on deck.

The crew looked askance at him at first, excepting one or two who sought to curry favor by a bow and a smile.

But the black cut them dead, and springing overboard, swam ashore, where he was met by every denizen of the island, who warmly greeted his return, while one and all were loud in their praise of the beautiful vessel which Merle had secured as his gold ship.

The craft was soon after warped, inshore, the crew made to understand what they had shipped for, and mingling with those on the island, the work of loading the vessel was begun.

In surprise almost equal to that felt by the interested seamen, Little Belt stood by and saw the treasures revealed.

First out of a cavern came box after box

of solid gold, then silver in like quantities, with costly trinkets of all kinds; gems in cases, and then precious stones in bags, with bales of silks and laces, heavy gold and silver sets, and altogether riches which no king could equal.

Merle was stern and silent during the removal of the treasures from the caverns and their transfer on board the vessel, and he eyed each article, box and case of gems curiously, not with sordid looks, but because they brought up to him the history of the past.

He looked back through the vista of years to his grandfather, Freelance, the Buccaneer, whose career had been one of sorrow and crime.

Then came the strange life of his father, Montezuma, the Merciless, whose life in prison for long years had been a living horror, and who had then dazzled mankind with his fascinations and fabulous wealth.

Then he thought of the sad end of that father and his mother, and his thoughts drifted to himself.

As in the case of his grandfather and father before him, life had held forth high hopes to him, to in the end crush them by no willful act of his own to do wrong.

He had been, like them, the football of a cruel destiny, and he was then an outlaw, a condemned mutineer, hunted by the very flag he had so loved to serve.

It was no wonder then that the youth's thoughts grew fearfully bitter as he stood there gazing at the treasure spread out before him, and which he had never seen exhumed from the darkened places where faithful Mezrak had hidden it, for with the wealth monarchs could not equal, he was yet an outcast from honorable men; he was but Merle, the condemned, to be even hunted by those who had once honored him.

Crushing a sigh between his teeth, he turned away and strolled over the island, little caring for the riches which were all his own.

And there, in his solitude, Mezrak found him when the sun marked the hour of noon, and told him that the gold ship was ready to sail.

Going on board, he ordered sail set; Mezrak took the helm, and with no flag at the peak, no haven in which to drop anchor, the Red Belt began her aimless cruise.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNLUCKY RECOGNITION.

The vessel which picked up Brandt, the Buccaneer, from the sea was a packet-ship, trading between New Orleans and Vera Cruz, and every kindness that could be shown the shipwrecked man was freely offered.

A surgeon happened to be on board, and the broken arm was quickly and skillfully set, and medicines given to restore the sufferer to consciousness and health.

In spite of all he had undergone, Brandt, the Buccaneer, was a man of iron constitution, and he quickly rallied, and ere two days had gone by he was himself again, apparently, though his crippled arm was a source of pain and woriment to him.

Knowing that the vessel was bound to New Orleans, he understood the danger of his going there without some disguise.

He had said that he was captain of an American schooner that had been dismasted in a gale, and himself and crew forced to take to the boats, when another storm had capsized the boats, and he alone of all had been saved.

His story was believed, and the deepest sympathy was shown for him among the crew, who were mostly Mexicans.

But there was one who doubted his story, after getting a good look at him the first day he appeared upon deck, and that one was the junior officer of the brig.

Walking up to Captain Brandt as he stood leaning over the taffrail alone one evening,

when the vessel was nearing the Belize, he said softly:

"How is it that Captain Brandt is without a ship?"

The pirate started and turned quickly upon the one who addressed him and beheld a wiry little man of middle age and with a heavily bearded face.

He failed to recall his face, but recognized him as an officer of the brig, and knowing well his danger replied:

"You have doubtless mistaken me for some one else, sir, for my name is Ford—Bradley Ford."

"Your name is Brentford—Brandt Brentford, better known as Brandt, the Buccaneer," was the cool reply.

The pirate chief had been too often in deadly danger to quail now, and he answered with a smile:

"It is strange, sir, that you offer insult to a shipwrecked and crippled man upon your own deck, when from all others I have had only kindness."

"It is because I know you as you are, Brandt, not having forgotten that I was once your prisoner, and that you robbed me of all I possessed in the world, when you captured and set fire to my schooner."

"Now I have a chance to get even with you, for there is a large price upon your head which I will get as your captor."

"You are certain that I am Brandt, the Buccaneer?" sharply said the pirate.

"I am."

"You are willing to take oath upon it?"

"Yes."

"You expect to get a large sum by my capture?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"About ten thousand pesos I believe."

"Would you not rather make a still larger sum?"

"Of course."

"If I confess that I am Brandt, the Buccaneer, and put you in a way to make a vast fortune, will you betray me?"

"Do you confess it?"

"Frankly, I do."

"Is not this a dodge to get off?"

"By no means, for I am in deadly earnest, and can make your fortune with your aid; but without it I can do nothing."

"How can you make my fortune?" asked the officer eagerly.

"You have heard of Merle Monte, the Mutineer Midshipman?"

"Now called Merle, the Condemned?"

"Yes."

"Yes; I have heard of him."

"You have also heard, I suppose, that he was the son of the famous Montezuma, the Merciless?"

"Yes, I have heard such a rumor."

"You know then of the fabulous wealth this Montezuma possessed?"

"Yes."

"Well, this boy has it all hidden on an island, and he and his slave, Mezrak, alone know where it is."

"The boy was sentenced to be hanged at the yard-arm for mutiny, of which I may honestly say he was not intentionally guilty, and I saved him."

"I heard of that," said the officer.

"Doubtless, for my movements are pretty generally heralded around."

"But, as I said, I saved him—and it was to carry out my own ends."

"Rumor had it that you were his father."

"That is nonsense."

"It was so asserted at his court-martial."

"Oh! I know all that; but I say to you that it is nonsense, for the boy's father was Montezuma, the Merciless, and he left him this fabulous wealth."

"The vessel with the treasure and the boy were wrecked on an island, and the gold and gems are there now."

"The boy I had in my power, and by

threatening to kill his slave, whom he dearly loves, if he did not reveal the secret of where lay the island, he yielded, and I was in sight of the island when my vessel was caught in a storm and wrecked, and I escaped in an open boat with some of my men, who, calling me a Jonah, threw me into the sea and broke my arm, as you see, with oars when I attempted to get into the boat again."

"You picked me up, and now I ask you to go with me to that island and I will share with you the treasure."

"But how are we to go?"

"You are an officer upon this vessel?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me take to my berth ill, and you take me to your state-room and keep me there."

"For what reason?"

"I will not be recognized in the city, and a friend of mine can come on board, for I will give you the address to see him, and ask you to take me back to Vera Cruz, and the captain will be paid liberally."

"Then I will have you cause your crew to desert—"

"But they will not."

"They will if they are paid for it."

"But who is to pay them?"

"I will."

"Well, go on."

"You will get your crew to desert and then ship men whom my friend will select for you."

"Once at sea the crew, under my leadership, will seize the vessel, and put all of your men and passengers not in the secret on some in-bound craft."

"And then?"

"Why, we will sail for the Treasures Island, get the fabulous wealth there, and after paying our men liberally, you and I will yet be as rich as kings."

"This sounds all very well," sneered the Mexican officer.

"It is all true."

"What proof have you?"

"My word only."

"Which is given when you are in danger of being hanged."

"I can say no more."

"But I can, for I am safe to make a cool ten thousand by delivering you up, while I will get a name and promotion by it, for it is no slight thing to be the captor of Brandt, the Buccaneer," and the Mexican laughed lightly, for he felt that he held the winning hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COMPROMISE.

"Which would you prefer, señor officer, the ten thousand pesos, or the honor of being the captor of Brandt, the Buccaneer?" asked the pirate chief, with a sneer.

"I prefer money to fame."

"I thought so."

"Any man of sense does."

"Certainly, any man of your caliber of sense; but I have the fame—"

"Such as it is."

"Yes. I have the fame, such as it is, and now I want the money; but I have a compromise to offer."

"Well?"

"Suppose I gave you the ten thousand pesos, will you then consent to play my cards to win the treasure?"

"Yes, but upon one condition."

"Name it."

"That I am supposed to be a victim of your attack, am put in irons by you, with the intention of having me shot as an old and bitter foe."

"Certainly."

"But, after you have sent off my captain and passengers, I am to be released and we are to have the treasure together."

"Why, this is a lucky thought on your part, for it will save your honor, and you should be careful of that, you know."

The Mexican thought he detected a sneer in the words of the chief, but the face did not show it, and he said:

"When are you to pay me this ten thousand *pesos*?"

"When I get on shore."

"I cannot trust you ashore."

"Ah!"

"No; and you remember you were to play sick in my state-room?"

"Yes, so I was, señor officer, but as you do not wish to trust me until we reach the city, tell me if you are a good judge of precious stones?"

"I am."

"In your own judgment?"

"No, for my father deals in gems."

"Then you should know a pure gem if you see it?"

"I do know."

"Then kindly tell me the value of this one."

The pirate chief, as he spoke indifferently, slipped into the hand of the Mexican officer a gem.

Taking it to the binnacle light the Mexican stared with surprise, and said, admiringly:

"It is a perfect gem."

"Any bright thing will glitter in the lamp-light."

"But I cannot be deceived in this diamond."

"Then name its value?"

"Twenty thousand *pesos*."

"You are a judge, I see."

"I told you I was."

"Well, just keep that gem in lieu of the ten thousand *pesos* my head is worth to you, or my neck, or whatever is of that value about me."

"Do you mean it?" asked the delighted Mexican.

"I do."

"A thousand thanks, and let me tell you that you are as safe with me now as you would be in the presence of your wife."

"Then I am most unsafe, señor officer, for the lady who holds that relationship to me would gladly kill me."

"I did not know that."

"Of course not, only draw some other simile of my safety."

"Say, for instance, as safe as I would be in jail."

"You are severe, captain."

"Well, I do not wish to be; but, tell me, do you agree to my terms?"

"With more than delight," cried the delighted officer.

"I thought so."

"Well, I don't feel well, so put me to bed."

The pirate chief leaned heavily upon the bulwark, and calling to a coxswain, the Mexican officer had him borne to his own pleasant state-room, and until the packet sailed on her outward trip from New Orleans, he was the shipwrecked stranger's devoted nurse.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SNARE OF THE PLOTTERS.

The good brig Montezuma, packet between Vera Cruz, Mexico, and New Orleans, was a favorite with all passengers that ever embarked in her for the pleasant voyage upon the Gulf.

She was trim built, comfortable, very fleet, well officered and manned, and had outsailed many a race in which a pirate craft was in her wake, besides having more than once, with her four small guns, beaten off the freebooters that hung about to plunder honest vessels.

But, somehow, luck seemed to turn against the good craft from the time she picked up the shipwrecked sailor at sea, and whom the reader knows to have been none other than Brandt, the Buccaneer.

Several of the passengers were taken sick before reaching New Orleans, the Montezuma got aground in crossing the bar at the mouth

of the Mississippi, a squall took out her fore-topmast, and in going to her dock she collided with another craft, which, though without damage to her trim hull, killed a sailor on her decks.

"There be a Jonah on board this trip, lads," was the announcement of an old sailor in the forecastle, and all began to believe it, so that when some of the crew were told to desert they readily did so, and others who decided to stick by the ship, Jonah or no Jonah, could not withstand a tempting offer made them to ship in a new service with good bounty, and thus the Montezuma had to sail on her return voyage with a picked-up lot on board.

But the new crew seemed to understand their duties, and the brig made a good run down the river, but again grounded on the bar.

Getting off she ran down a small fishing smack in the darkness, and the few croakers who had remained on board said:

"Boys, the Jonah wasn't left behind."

"But who is he?" was asked.

"It must be the sick sailor we picked-up, and who is in Senor Valero's room."

"It might be"

"Yes, and the señor is as kind to him as a brother could be, so don't let him hear a word ag'in him."

So much for the talk in the forecastle among the half-dozen seamen who had not deserted their ship.

And in the cabin the passengers were anxious, for, contrary to custom, though from accidental delay by not getting her crew on time, the Montezuma had sailed on Friday.

This was sure to bring bad luck all said, and many wished they had not come.

But they wished it far more when one dark night there appeared upon deck a tall man wearing his arm in a sling—it was the sailor who had been picked up at sea—and his voice rung out in trumpet tones:

"Hounds to the rescue! seize the ship!"

There was a struggle upon the quarter-deck, a fight amidships, a few shots, some clashing of steel against steel, a death-cry, a groan of agony, heavy falls, a change of men at the wheel, and the Montezuma was the prize of Brandt, the Buccaneer.

Then the secret came out that the man who had been picked up and so kindly cared for, who had been nursed by Senor Valero as a brother, had been the cruel pirate himself.

The dead were quickly thrown overboard, a plantation drogher was hauled, and the passengers and good men of the crew were put on board, the captain of the Montezuma also accompanying them, while poor Senor Valero, the sub-officer of the packet, being recognized as an old foe of the pirate chief, was to be carried on in the captured vessel, to be shot or hung up to the yard-arm.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PIRATE'S PROMISE.

UNDER her new master, the good brig Montezuma took on a different name and a different aspect.

The former was *The Huntress* and the latter was a decidedly more warlike appearance.

Running into Galveston with signals of distress flying, she shipped an additional crew of half a hundred men, Brandt remarking to Senor Valero, who with no reason now to wear a mask appeared as second officer:

"We must be able to protect ourselves, Senor Valero, if we are attacked."

"Yes, we have now some seventy men, but our guns are very light."

"I can soon remedy that, for there are guns at the island where the treasure lies," was the reply.

Then the good vessel and its evil crew set sail for the Treasure Island, but adverse winds came, a hurricane drove her far off of her course, and it was two months since his leaving that night in an open boat, driven away by a woman, before he again sighted

the "promised land"—the Mecca of his hopes, his dreams for many long years.

But at last the land hove in sight, and it was on a pleasant, balmy day, just such an one as the chief desired for his purpose, for he well knew it was no easy matter to run in without a pilot.

Under his guidance in a boat far ahead, the brig was towed into the basin, a most daring feat even for a daring man to do.

There had been no storm from a direction to break the wreck of the Sea Serpent in pieces since he left, and there lay the highly-prized guns of the once beautiful craft.

But it was gold and silver, not iron and steel, that Brandt, the Buccaneer, craved, and landing quickly, he sought for the treasure upon the island.

He had not gone far before he came upon a post set in the hard earth, and upon it a box of iron.

Eagerly he sprung toward it, for at last the treasure was in his grasp.

Upon the top of the box was painted in red letters:

"The contents of this iron box are left for
BRANDT, THE BUCCANEER,
BY
MERLE, THE CONDEMNED."

He threw open the heavy lid, and started back with a cry that caused his men to shrink from him with fright.

What he found written was a letter addressed:

"To Brandt Brentford, alias Brandt, the Buccaneer."

Hastily he broke the seal and read, while his face grew livid:

"SIR PIRATE—I have this day sailed in my own vessel, a flagless, havenless craft, with all my treasures on board. By the request of my First Luff, Belle Denham, alias 'Little Belt,' Mr. Belden, 'Black Diamond,' and the 'Black Phœnix,' I leave you something to treasure, viz.:

"Manacles to fit your wrists and ankles."

"A rope to hang you with."

"A flag for you to die under."

"Should you desire to reap revenge upon me, you have but to find upon the high seas

"THE GOLD SHIP."

All saw that Brandt, the Buccaneer, was wild with passion, and they shrank from before him, as seizing the manacles, rope and black flag left him by Merle, he walked back to the beach.

"On to that wreck, you hounds, and transfer those guns to this brig!" he yelled, in tones that made the crew spring as nimbly to work as monkeys.

Twice did Senor Valero speak to the chief, without an answer, and the third time it proved fatal to the Mexican officer, for Brandt, the Buccaneer, turned upon him like an enraged hyena.

"Aha! you are here, are you?

"You who wished me to keep you in irons that your honor might be saved?"

"Well, your honor is safe, but your part of the treasure and your life you shall lose."

The Mexican shrank from him, but seizing him, Brandt yelled:

"Ho, here, men, trice this man up to the yard-arm!"

"He would have hanged me once, but that I bought him off, and now I shall return the compliment."

"I need a victim to cool my blood, so up with him!"

The frightened crew dropped their work upon the guns, and seizing the shrinking wretch, threw a noose about his neck, and the writhing, groaning mass of wicked humanity was dragged into mid-air, while Brandt, the Buccaneer, stood on deck giving vent to peals of demoniacal laughter.

Without rest the men, awed by the terrible chief, toiled on through the night, and then the brig put to sea thoroughly armed and manned, while Brandt, the Buccaneer, shouted forth:

"Now, Merle, the Condemned, you have a bloodhound upon your wake that will never leave it until I am avenged to my irremovable heart's core."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OTHER SEA HOUNDS TAKE UP THE CRY.
I WILL now return to the two seamen who got rid of the presence of Brandt, the Buccaneer, in the boat by coolly throwing him into the sea.

Unheeding the thought that they left him to die, they held on for the light discerned ahead, and found that it came from a hamlet of Mexican fishermen.

To them they told the story of a treasure they could gain if they only had a ship and a daring crew, and while the old men laughed at them, the wilder spirits entered into their plot, and took them to Vera Cruz in their largest fishing smack.

There they readily found an adventurous sea captain, upon whom the suspicion of wrong-doing on the ocean had fallen, to enter into their enterprise; and, with half a hundred brave men at his back, it did not take him long to get a vessel, for not having one, or the money to purchase one, the next thing to do was to cut a craft out of the harbor.

The bold captain, going upon the principle that he "might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb," daringly boarded at midnight a small Mexican cruiser off the Castle *San Juan d'Uloa*, and almost under its guns, and, that no one of the crew should appear against him, cruelly threw all who had not been killed overboard.

Thus being supplied with a craft, he named it the *Gold Hunter*, and with the two pirates of Brandt's old crew as his officers, Captain Eduardo set sail for Treasure Island.

The two seamen knew well how to reef and furl, swab decks and load cannon, and also understood well the art of throat-cutting; but as navigators they were pronounced failures, and it was quite a long time before they at last found the island.

And the day that they landed there was the one following that on which Brandt, the Buccaneer, had departed, and of course there was nothing for them to find, other than the iron box and the letter to the pirate chief, which told the two traitor freebooters that their chief was not dead as they believed.

Had there been any doubt of this, the next day, when also in search of the *Gold Ship*, they captured a craft which had already fallen under the ban of Brandt, the Buccaneer, and were told that the dreaded chief was in reality afloat once more.

But they loved gold enough to risk their lives for it, and the gold hunter, like the huntress, went forth in search of the ship that bore Merle Monte's treasure.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

KIND reader, to follow the *Gold Ship* in all her wanderings, with no flag and no haven in any land, drifting from sea to sea under the guidance of Merle, the condemned midshipman, would take another volume; so I can but tell you, that though pursued by pirates, adventurers, and vessels of war, prominent among the latter being the *Sea Wolf*, on which the wandering youth had once been an officer, she went from sea to sea, defying pursuit, defying tempests, and at last found a haven where rest could be found, and that was only when the stain of outlaw was rubbed off the name of my gallant though unfortunate hero, who, in the end won rank and honored fame by bringing to a just end at the yard-arm Brandt, the Buccaneer, and other free rovers.

As for Little Belt, she, too, figured in the wild scenes that were interwoven in the cruise of the *Gold Ship*, and Mezrak, the Faithful was as true to the end as he had been through the past to Montezuma's heir.

See "Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Pride," a companion story to "The Gold Ship; or, Monte, the Condemned."

THE END.

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- 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs.
- 3 THE GAINSBORO' HAT and 62 other Songs.
- 4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs.
- 5 I'LL STRIKE YOU WITH A FEATHER and 62 others.
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- 21 INDIGNANT POLLY WOO and 59 other Songs.
- 22 THE OLD ARM-CHAIR and 58 other Songs.
- 23 ON CONEY ISLAND BEACH and 58 other Songs.
- 24 OLD SIMON, THE HOT-CORN MAN and 60 others.
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- 31 SWEET FORGET-ME-NOT and 55 other Songs.
- 32 LITTLE BABY MINE and 53 other Songs.
- 33 DE BANJO AM DE INSTRUMENT FOR ME and 53 others.
- 34 TAFFY and 50 other Songs.
- 35 JUST TO PLEASE THE BOYS and 52 other Songs.
- 36 SKATING ON ONE IN THE GUTTER and 52 others.
- 37 KOLORED KRANKS and 59 other Songs.
- 38 NIL DESPERANDUM and 53 other Songs.
- 39 THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME and 50 other Songs.
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